

manner—a manner consistent with our national security interests. It is a legally enforceable formulation that should be embraced by all who are truly concerned with finding a solution to the problems in Iraq, not just using the debate over the war in Iraq as a political football.

Surely, we owe the over 2,500 patriotic souls who have died fighting for our country in Iraq a little more time on this debate. Surely, we can consider the matter of the conflict in Iraq for a few more hours for the sake of the over 18,000 U.S. troops who have been wounded in that country, and the unknown numbers of Iraqi innocents who have been killed or maimed. Surely, we can discuss this matter on a level that is deeper than sloganeering like “cut and run” or “stay the course.”

Mr. President, I hope our two leaders will work together to find a way for the Senate to debate my amendment and allow a vote on its merits.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, what is the time agreement this evening?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia is allocated 40 minutes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, on behalf of the Senator from Virginia, I yield myself as much time as I might consume. We have speakers coming down here and, as they arrive, we will recognize them.

I do want to express my appreciation to Members on both sides who have participated in this debate. We have already had a very spirited debate. There will be others speaking throughout the course of the evening and again tomorrow before we ultimately vote on both of these amendments.

As you know, we have in front of us two amendments. One is a sense of the Senate, a nonbinding resolution, the Levin amendment, and we also have the Kerry amendment, which has a force of law and which would require a withdrawal from Iraq by next summer.

As we consider and contemplate both of those amendments, I know there are strong emotions that Members on both sides feel with respect to this issue, and clearly for good reason. I know in my own particular circumstance, as I travel South Dakota, I hear from people all across my State. I have participated, as many Senators have, in way too many funerals and have heard the playing of taps way too many times in the last year. It is that sentiment I think that makes people in this country very weary regarding the conflict in Iraq and the cost it has brought this country in terms of both blood and treasure. So as we see Members get up and express their thoughts on the Senate floor during the course of this debate, I think they are in many cases reflecting the sentiments of their constituents in their States, as well.

Generally speaking, I think a sense that people have across the country is

one of weariness with this conflict in Iraq. At the same time, I think we have to recognize what the stakes are in this debate and what the risks are as well. Clearly, as we have, I think, articulated—Members on our side—throughout the course of this debate, the stakes are high and the consequences of failure are disastrous for our country if we fail in this campaign in Iraq.

I have to say that, like many Members here, I have traveled to Iraq on a couple of different occasions. I was there as recently as a couple of months ago with Senator MCCAIN, as well as with the Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. FEINGOLD, and a number of our Governors and House Members, representing different regions of the country. I had been there a year earlier and, of course, in the course of that year much had changed. In fact, I would have to say there had been, at that time, some mixed results. We had seen the outbreak of sectarian violence after the bombing of the shrine at Samara. But at the same time, we had seen vast improvements in the ability of the Iraqi security forces to provide for their own security. That, in my mind, was very encouraging because at that time about 75 percent of the battle areas were being policed either by Iraqi armed services or the police force, which was a marked improvement from the time I had been there a year before.

Mr. President, I think it is fair to say that, by any measure, if you look at any significant metric in the past year or so, we have seen some improvements and progress made in Iraq and I think, in a substantial way, in the broader war on terror. If you look particularly at Iraq, Prime Minister al-Maliki, just in the last couple of weeks, completed the formation of a new Iraqi Government, filling many Cabinet positions. If you look at the success our troops have had in taking out the terrorist leader, Musab al-Zarqawi and many of his allies in just the last few weeks, that is a huge blow to al-Qaida and a huge victory for our side in the war on terror.

As I said earlier, the Iraqi security forces are growing in number every single day. Only a year and a half ago, Iraqi security forces had just begun to form. Today, there are 264,400 trained and equipped Iraqi security forces, which is more than double the number of U.S. troops who are serving in the region.

The beginning of this year, 2006, the Iraqi security forces had 10 brigades and 43 battalions that controlled areas of responsibility. Here, only a few months later, those numbers are nearly doubled to 18 brigades and 71 battalions. Large- and small-scale water treatment facilities have been rehabilitated or constructed for an estimated 3 million people at a standard level of service, with plans underway to deliver clean, safe drinking water to 5 million more. May oil production was over 2.1 million barrels per day.

The U.S. Treasury Department is sending professionals to Iraq to provide

technical support for the creation of a public finance system that is accountable and transparent. The State Department is coordinating a broad effort to support an economic policy framework that enhances investments, job creation, and growth.

I have to say that that progress has occurred—and many of my colleagues have spoken in favor of these amendments in spite of the presence of Americans and our troops' efforts—due to and because of the efforts of our troops and their presence there. Contrary to what I have heard some of my colleagues on the other side say throughout the course of this debate, when I was in Iraq, which was as recently as a couple months ago, as I said, the Iraqi political leaders I talked to made it very clear that they thought it was important that we have a presence in Iraq.

I have heard Members get up on the floor and say they have talked to people there and they say they want us out, and they don't want the door to hit us on the way out. But that is certainly not the message that was delivered to me and the delegation I was with when we were there. I also have to say that part of our mission in going there was to impress upon the Iraqi leadership, the political leaders in that country, the importance of forming a national unity government, and to end the sectarianism and the sectarian violence that ravaged that area during the time that we were there. They have made that progress in the last couple of months since our departure from Iraq. They have formed this national unity government, and they continue to make progress toward what I believe is a democracy inclusive of the Shiites, the Sunnis, the Kurds, and the various groups over there that are all struggling to come together behind a government and to be able to assume responsibility for their own governance and also for their own security.

It seems to me at least that right now it would not be a good signal to send either to them or to our men and women who are fighting the good fight in Iraq that we intend to pull out at any particular time certain. It seems, just as a matter of policy, what we are simply doing when we do that is telegraphing to the terrorists our intentions, and they will just wait us out, that we are going to leave at some point and they will be able to assume control in that region. If there is a vacuum at some point, they will be able to step in and fill it.

I think we are at a strategic turning point, and I think we are at that point due to the good work of the men and women wearing the uniform. We have to listen to what they are saying and what our commanders on the ground are saying. I don't think it is in the best interest of our troops or the overall campaign in Iraq for us to be here in Washington, DC, in a political body such as the Senate—although clearly we have responsibilities with respect to